

Holiday 1st noted in 1970s

Union Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger landed in Galveston June 19, 1865, and read a proclamation from the president of the United States:

"In accordance with a proclamation from the executive of the United States, all slaves are free."

Texas slaves did not get the word Jan. 1, when Abraham Lincoln made the declaration. They did not get the word in May, when some of the other southern states did.

"It's sometimes known as emancipation day," UTEP history professor Charles Martin said. "It is a grass-roots holiday, finally declared by the Texas state Legislature in the late 1970s."

Juanita McCray, director of the Family Support Child Crisis Center, said, "It finally became a holiday — one of two or three you could choose from — for state employees. When I was a state employee, I tried to explain to them that this was far more important than just a day off for me."

Martin said the state of Texas was commonly recognizing Robert E. Lee's birthday and Jefferson Davis' birthday, before acknowledging the existence of June 19.

CELEBRATIONS

Juneteenth celebrations today in El Paso:

■ **Combined observances** by the McCall Neighborhood Center and Douglass High School Alumni, 5 to 7 p.m. at the center, 3231 E. Wyoming. **Information:** 591-2630 or 598-5145.

■ **"An Emancipation Nostalgic Reception"** is also at 5 p.m. at the center. **Information:** 566-2407.



Leonel Monroy / El Paso Times

Tommie Bell, center, sang with daughter Nicole Goldsbrough, left, and friend Jackie Bryant to the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at UTEP Friday.

Juneteenth

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ed. "If we don't educate our kids — and everyone — of this holiday, we all lose something. The chasm will grow. We need to be aware of all cultures ... German, English, Spanish. It's like the Holocaust. We keep repeating the story so it will never happen again."

What it means

But are young people today aware of their heritage, aware of the significance of June 19th?

"This is a holiday that started slowly in the 19th century," said UTEP history professor Charles Martin. "It became widespread in the mid-20th century. Then, in the 1960s, it faded. It was seen as kind of an old folks' holiday. I guess it bottomed out in the '70s, but made a comeback in the 1980s. It's a folk holiday, like St. Patrick's Day for the Irish ... except on a much more important level because of why it came about."

So, young people are slowly becoming aware.

"I'm sure most kids my age are aware of Juneteenth," said Nicole Bell, a 16-year-old student at Austin High. "But I don't know if they really know the meaning of it. We all know so very little of our history. We hear about the American Revolution, but we never hear of the

blacks who fought in the American Revolution. So little is taught in the schools."

Marcus Faison, 16, moved to El Paso four years ago from North Carolina. But he did not hear about Juneteenth in the schools.

"I learned about it from all the black people here," the student at Irvin High said. "It's important more people should know about this. We have to know about our past to keep it from happening again in the future."

Not forgotten

So what can be done now? How can today's youth be better linked to those ancestors who toiled in slavery, who felt an indescribable joy June 19th, 1865?

"Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy," Tommie Bell said. "I want my daughter to know where her roots are. I don't teach her prejudice. I just want her to know that everybody is equal, to be proud of what we are."

Washington said she expects help in the near future from the El Paso Independent School District.

"I'm working with the El Paso district to get a textbook on black history," she said. "I think the celebration is coming back. There's been an awakening in the community — just not enough."

What is Juneteenth?

This holiday, which is an abbreviated form of "June Nineteenth", marks the day in 1865 when Union Gen. Gordon Granger arrived at Galveston Island and read President Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation, freeing the slaves. The proclamation had originally taken effect on January 1, 1863, but was unknown to slaves in Texas for more than two years after being signed by Lincoln.

June 19, Juneteenth as it is commonly called, is Emancipation Day in Texas. Even though it is considered a Texas holiday,

Juneteenth continues to spread and be celebrated all over the United States.

In El Paso, on Sunday, a Juneteenth Emancipation Nostalgic Reception will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. at the McCall Neighborhood Center at 3231 E. Wyoming.

Juneteenth is indeed a time for celebration, but it is also important to remember that Juneteenth celebrations are a tribute to those African-Americans who fought so long and worked so hard to make the dream of equality a reality.